

Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board

Alleys in Forest Grove

By George Cushing

Growing up in mid-1950s suburban ranch style housing, I never knew there were such things as alleys. Since moving to Forest Grove I have come to love many parts of the town. One of the most interesting items, not exclusive to small towns, is found in even the largest cities the world over: alleys.

Most alleys are used for the same reason (access) although the reasons for their existence have generally developed in two different ways - first for access to service buildings and the second for rental housing.

Service buildings generally were created to service the more aristocratic homes of the wealthy. The alleys gave access to the servants' quarters, kitchens, stables and carriage houses. By having the formal entrance on the street and placing the other elements on the alley, they were able to remove objectionable odors from the stables, increase safety and allow the servants immediate access to both these outbuildings as well as the home. Prior to the 20th century, kitchens were generally located in a separate building from the main house, thereby removing both the danger of fire as well as cooking odors. Since the key function of outbuildings was to service the main house, the alley view is often of the wall of a building or fencing, with only a minimum of windows and doors required for access to the alley.

Rental housing often was placed on alleys, again as an offshoot of the outbuildings placed behind the main house. By placing the barns and garages on the alley they were able to squeeze more homes on streets laid out with long narrow lots. While the street sides of the houses were trimmed, proper and substantial, the buildings along the alleys developed in a more haphazard way. Many rental

houses started as small sheds, barns and other small temporary structures, then after many additions and changes eventually were converted to rental housing. With some, a house was first built on the street and later moved to the alley as the owners prospered and built a larger home. The type of alley in these areas is generally more open, with many of the buildings set back from the alley and lawns separating the buildings. Often, small independent businesses operated out of alley buildings on this more casual type of alley.

Today, alleys are generally neat and clean; we can thank the reform efforts from the early 1900s for bringing the required sanitation and building standards enjoyed on the street back to the alleys. But in the early days they were considered unsavory. The location of the outdoor privy in the backyard necessitated placing sewers in the alleys in the 20s and 30s. Furthermore, vices such as prostitution, gambling and illegal alcohol businesses led many people to look down on alleys. But most alleys were pleasant places, and we even now have many alley addresses that are very prestigious. As an example - in Philadelphia, Elfreth's Alley is noted for perfectly restored narrow row houses from the 1720s and is advertised as "the oldest continuously inhabited street in the United States."

Both streets and alleys were originally established as public right of way. When originally platted alleys were set aside and placed under control of the city to be used for public purposes including installation of utilities. With changing needs, certain streets and alleys were no longer needed for the original use and provisions were made for changes. These changes can include vacating them, although because they normally contain utilities they are

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The activity that is the subject of this publication has been financed in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, as provided through the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. However, the contents and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of any trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

not normally returned to private ownership. There are, however, some alleys that have been vacated in Forest Grove – in fact, we do have one alley in Old Town that was vacated in 1992, and now not even the tell-tale signs of the most overgrown alley remain. But most of the areas of Old Town still have alleys.

Alleys are considered in the same category as other public property such as sidewalks and parking strips with the same responsibilities where homeowner is responsible for the maintenance.

Forest Grove has some unusual alleys. One of them wraps around the OK Floral Building at Pacific and College. What serves as an alley by providing access to buildings and trashcans is in fact a separate city-owned tax lot. Another small anomaly wraps around our own city hall. What appears to be a small pedestrian-sized alley is in fact the building setback and is not a public thoroughfare. The large alley between Main and A Street opens up into the city-owned parking lot. Just south of downtown lies a small alley just one block long and five feet wide. Another interesting alley is paved with asphalt - one of the best examples of a mixed-use alley with garages, housing and businesses intermixed with lawns. Usage has necessitated that it be covered with more than just gravel.

We are lucky in Forest Grove to have our alleys, and we all know the 'normal' alley such as those in Old Town. But are you aware we have the most modern type of

alley as well? The new 'neo traditional' style of housing offers a return to the planning aspects of long ago with smaller, more intimate front yards and garages placed on the alley. This encourages higher housing density and more local street usage. We are lucky to have one of the best examples of this style of building on the north side of town in the Larrabee Subdivision. And, ours makes a significant statement. On the street we see only the attractive homes, without the garage overpowering the house as in many newer developments. In the back on the alley we see the garage, driveway and fence but in the closeness of the alley you see the signs of friendships quickly forming as neighbors wave to each other as they go about their daily routines.

Because many alleys have storm and sanitary sewer lines located in them they will probably be a part of Forest Grove for many years. So we can see the alley serves a very real need as well as a place in history - and viewed properly alleys can be a things of beauty.

Sources include:

James Bash, Alleys – A Reminiscence.

The Alley, A Backstreet History of New York's

Communities Published in 'VOICES: The Journal of New York Folklore'

Neo-Traditional Neighborhood Design: U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration.

The Alleys and Back Buildings of Galveston; An Architectural and Social History by Ellen Beasley.

George Cushing, the newest member of the Forest Grove Historical Landmarks Board, is interested in any information people may have about Forest Grove's alleys and hopes to offer a follow up article in the future.

Insuring Historic Homes

By Mark Everett

Owning an historic home can be a wonderful experience. The unique architecture and qualities of historic homes - items like hardwood floors, high ceilings, special moldings, and wood windows - all contribute to breathing character into a house.

Many owners of historic homes are now exploring the option of obtaining special homeowner's insurance policies. These policies are generally more expensive than a regular homeowners policy. This is because of the special elements that may be included in an historic home policy. Things like guaranteed replacement-in-kind-coverage, restoration consultants, specially trained appraisers, ordinance and code coverage, unlimited loss-

of-use coverage and higher than normal limits in a number of areas may all be included in the policy.

Obtaining historic home coverage usually starts with a visit by an insurance consultant trained in the assessment of historical home qualities. They can visit a home and identify one-of-a-kind features. An important part of their service is to advise homeowners how to protect unique home features. They help homeowners think in terms of security and of ways to protect their home from damage. Discussing preventive maintenance is a big part of what they do in their consultant's role.

Once a claim is made, insurers generally pay extra attention to the repair and replacement process of an

historic home. An important aspect of the insurer's expertise is related to local and state code requirements. Once an historic home is damaged any repairs must include bringing the home up to current codes. Houses that are listed on either the Historic Register, or are part of an historic district may fall under the jurisdiction of an historic-district committee, which oversees the repairs. This is to insure that the home is repaired in such a way that it will keep the historic integrity even though it has been damaged. Insurance companies will oftentimes work closely with the homeowner and the contractor to be sure the restoration is true to the original character of the home. Matching repair wood to the original, ordering slate for a damaged roof from the original slate producer and replacing damaged molding with exact replicas are all part of the historic homeowner policy.

An historic home policy will undoubtedly be more expensive than a regular policy. How much more is uncertain. The more specialty items in the home the more the policy will cost. An historic home purchased for \$300,000 will have a replacement value of considerably more. This would mean that the cost of the premiums would also be more. Another thing to note is that because many historic homes qualify as fixer-uppers it is important for the owner to update their homeowner's insurance periodically. As the value of the home increases, the insurance coverage should also increase.

Information for this article was taken from
www.Insure.com

Preserving the Unique History of Your Historic Home

By Scott Rogers

The Home's History

An historic home is constantly changing; the time we spend in them is but a chapter of the complete story. From various clues found throughout a house, we can start to paint a picture of those that have come before us and how a house may have originally looked.

An old house can hold many clues to its past; some may be obvious, such as the trim in the living room or the style of architecture. Others may be subtler, such as the layers of paint discovered while stripping a door or the signature of the homebuilder scrawled in the back of a closet. When looking for a home's history, approach it in a couple of ways: the house itself and the occupants who cherished it.

The Inhabitant's History

A remodeling project can also become a treasure hunt, in search of items long left behind and forgotten by a previous occupant. Old toys under a stairwell, antique coins, and letters stuffed in the floor. Items such as these hint at the history of those who came before you; the day-to-day items associated with life in the early 1900s. During the process of remodeling our circa 1900 house, we have found numerous items: an 1894 report card under the stairs, the original stained-glass front door down in the basement, old stamps in a wall. It's always exciting to find something unexpected. What else is lurking about that we haven't found? What are we leaving for the next owners to find?

Become a Part of the History

My wife and I have been going through our house, room by room; attempting to replace trim long since gone, wallpaper since painted over. Our home was a duplex for decades, and the majority of the character has literally been stripped right out of it. So as we go through and remodel, we try to be sure to preserve what is still right. We have exposed the high ceilings, taken out false walls, and replaced non-original trim with period-style. Constantly looking for clues along the way, we are trying to preserve all that has gradually been lost of our house's character. Now, when we find little treasures, which is quite rare, we are sure to set them aside for safekeeping. Much of the remaining original trim was signed by the first home owner/builder, so we hold onto some of the samples. Our stairs were recently completely rebuilt, but we kept all the beautiful old fir treads and the amazing hand-notched stair skirt board. All of these things will be left here if we ever decide to leave, as it all belongs to the house - not us. The same is true with the things left behind by previous homeowners. All of it will be put into a little storage box and passed to the next occupants; a legacy of sorts.

Another topic to consider is a photo history of the house, from the initial purchase through the various phases of a remodel. Before we start any big project, we take photos and then set to work. We take photos while the construction is in progress, then also a final "finished" photo. This not only helps catalog the history of the house, but it is great for record keeping (where did that water line run?) and offers a bit of satisfaction in a remodeling job well done. It is amazing how quickly one forgets just how awful it was "before" compared to "after". That's the hope anyway!

Update on the Eric Stewart Collection

The work in cataloging the Eric Stewart Collection is getting closer! The material has been moved out of the city building and into a workspace in the library and the area is set up for the work. Next, the database for cataloging the material has been set up and is currently being tested. As soon as the testing is completed, a call for volunteers will be sent out. Keep your eyes open – look for more information and the call for help over the summer!

The Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board Grant Program

Is your house on our local register? If it is - did you know that your house is eligible for restoration / rehabilitation grant funding? The Historic Landmarks Board has funds to help you with your projects. If you are planning any exterior restoration work such as restoring architectural features or if you have structural work to do such a foundation repair, we'd love to help. We fund projects up to 50% of the cost of the job per grant. Come see us! We can also help you find historically appropriate solutions to any problems you may have.

The Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board

Cheryl Hunter (Chair).....503-357-2999
.....Cheryl.Hunter@nike.com
Scott Rogers (Secretary).....503-357-8265
.....SRogers@extensis.com
Elizabeth Muncher.....503-357-6168
.....Elizabeth.A.Muncher@tek.com
Mark Everett.....503-359-4392
.....hbrain@teleport.com
Monty Smith.....503-357-7804
.....montys@orel.ws
George Cushing.....503-357-3389
.....george.cushing@worldtravel.com

Preserving Forest Grove is a quarterly newsletter published by the Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board to help fulfill its duty of public education regarding the preservation of cultural resources. If you would like to be on the mailing list, please call James Reitz at 503-992-3233, or JReitz@ci.forest-grove.or.us.

***Historic Landmarks Board
City of Forest Grove
PO Box 236
Forest Grove, OR 97116***

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